



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Sunagawa farmers prevent expansion of Tachikawa Air Force Base, 1956-57

Time period notes: *The majority of action took place from 1956 to 1957. I am assuming the campaign began after the announcement of the air force base expansion in 1955 (exact date not known), but any nonviolent action or events before October 1956 are not known.*

October

1956

to: July

1957

Country: Japan

Location City/State/Province: Sunagawa, Tachikawa, Tokyo

Location Description: farmland near the Tachikawa Air Force Base

Goals:

To stop the expansion of the Tachikawa Air Force Base runway

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 016. Picketing › outside Tachikawa Air Force Base
- 028. Symbolic sounds › beating of drums
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 171. Nonviolent interjection › human blockades
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › of own farmland

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 016. Picketing › outside Tachikawa Air Force Base
- 171. Nonviolent interjection › human blockades
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › of own farmland

Notes on Methods:

One police officer committed suicide in protest against Japanese government policy.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Buddhist priests
- farmers
- students
- unionists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Sunagawa farmers, ex-Premier Tetsu Katayama, ex-Justice Minister Akira Kazami, ex-Foreign Minister Hachire Arita, Shinkichi Unno

Partners:

Buddhist priests, students, unionists, Shingo Shibata, Socialist Party members, Sunagawa mayor Miyazaki

External allies:

First Secretary Sanzo Nosaka, Councillor Masao Iwama of the Communist Party

Involvement of social elites:

(ex-)government officials listed above

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Shinkichi Unno
- ex-Foreign Minister Hachire Arita
- ex-Justice Minister Akira Kazami
- ex-Premier Tetsu Katayama

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The entrances of leaders and allies are unknown. The ex-Premier Tetsu Katayama, ex-Justice Minister Akira Kazami, ex-Foreign Minister Hachire Arita, and lawyer Shinkichi Unno began the Defend Sunagawa Campaign in October 1956, but they most likely had joined the original campaign earlier.

Segment Length: *Approximately 50 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Japanese government, United States government, Tachikawa Air Force Base

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Police beat and trampled protesters

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

The Tachikawa Air Force Base (AFB) was a US airfield in western Tokyo. The US military and the Japanese government planned to use this airfield for transporting nuclear weapons. In order to accommodate for the larger aircraft needed to transport these weapons, the Tachikawa AFB needed to expand and lengthen the runway for longer landing and takeoff distances. However, that meant that the government would need to use the surrounding farmland for the expansion. The US military announced the plans for expansion in 1955. In response, farmers, villagers, students, unionists, and Buddhist priests in Sunagawa, the small village adjacent to the Tachikawa AFB, began a campaign of nonviolent interjection and occupation of their own farmland in order to physically prevent officials from surveying and taking their land.

Protests began in October 1956. Any actions the protestors took before 1956 are not currently known. On October 12, police beat villagers and demonstrators with clubs, injuring 260 people. The next day, four thousand people including Diet (Japanese Parliament) members from the Socialist party, the Councilor of the Communist Party, and First Secretary Sanzo Nosaka created a human barricade against the surveyors. The crowd came within 150 yards of the base when police began to physically remove, trample, kick, and poke at the eyes of picketers as authorities forcibly tried to take land by driving stakes into the ground. Members of the Diet led the protest by linking arms and forming a human blockade while Buddhist priests in white robes beat incessantly on drums, the sound of which competed with the drone of the planes overhead and became an audio symbol of the movement. A total of 730 people including medical units, reporters, and cameramen were injured that day.

That same day, fifty leading men of culture including ex-Premier Tetsu Katayama, ex-Justice Minister Akira Kazami, ex-Foreign Minister Hachiro Arita, and prominent lawyer Shinkichi Unno launched the Defend Sunagawa Campaign. They declared that expansion of the base was undesirable and that the survey and plans to launch nuclear attacks violated the Japanese Constitution, which protects the rights of the Japanese people and forbids all kinds of warfare. They also argued that the expansion program was never ratified by the Diet.

A few days later, a policeman committed suicide in protest against the government policy.

By October 15, ten thousand people were involved in the protest, a thousand had been injured, and another thousand had been arrested. The tension culminated in the “Sunagawa Riots”, which took place on July 8, 1957. That day, protestors managed to

break past the police and into the base possibly through sheer numbers. Twenty-three people were arrested and seven were indicted on criminal trespassing charges. Although the events that day were called the “Sunagawa Riots,” the extent of violence or nonviolence that occurred is unknown. Any actions taken between October and July are also unknown.

The US military cancelled the expansion program in 1957 in response to the Sunagawa protests. The farmers’ successful campaign also inspired farmers in Narita in their protest against the construction of the Narita Airport (1966-78). The Tachikawa AFB land was later returned to the Japanese government and turned into the Showa Commemorative National Government Park.

Research Notes

Influences:

The successful Sunagawa farmers inspired farmers protesting the construction of Narita Airport in 1966-78 (2).

Sources:

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